

# AMERICAN PEOPLE WIN OUT OVER PRIVATE SECURITY COMPANIES IN AIRLINE SECURITY CONFERENCE AGREEMENT

- Today, the House and Senate conferees passed an historic agreement on airline security. This is a major victory for the American people, and a crucial beginning to the recovery from the September 11<sup>th</sup> tragedy. This measure – which like the Senate-passed bill federalizes aviation screening – will go a long way to restore public confidence in airline safety and travel and shore up our economy.
- This measure scraps the current private screening system that auctions off our security to the lowest-bidder. Under the conference agreement, the federal government would immediately begin taking over control of airport screening functions, and within one year federal law enforcement agents would screen all baggage and passengers, similar to the bipartisan and unanimously passed Senate bill. We would never consider contracting out the duties of the U.S. Customs Service, Border Patrol or your local police department, and it makes no sense to do so with airport screeners — the front line in aviation security.
- The conference report acknowledges that to ensure the safety of airline passengers, we must have security agents who are professional, well-trained and highly qualified – not employees that private contractors, who win contracts through low bids, hire for fast food service wages who turn over every six months. The measure puts federal law enforcement in charge of security to ensure that security agents are paid salaries and provided benefits commensurate with the law enforcement responsibilities of screening.
- Further, the conference report contains provisions to ensure that federalization works to improve the safety of passengers on U.S. planes. After three years, airports could petition to opt out of using federal screeners, but only if they meet strict federal standards. The conference agreement also includes a pilot program to make sure that the federalization program provides better safety than private security screening.
- On top of federalization, the conference agreement contains a number of other important safeguards to beef up aviation safety. The conference agreement requires that all baggage must be checked by the end of 2002. Further, it expands the federal air marshal program. The conference agreement puts authority and oversight in a new multi-modal section of the Department of Transportation, as proposed by House Democrats.
- The American people have waited more than 8 weeks for Congress to improve airline safety. Unfortunately, it was a few House Republicans held up progress in their ideological zeal against the federal government. More than one month ago, the Senate unanimously passed a bipartisan bill to federalize airline security. But,

House Republicans leader first blocked consideration of any bill in order to buy time to get special interest lobbyists for the private security firms working to defeat federalization. Then House Leaders narrowly passed a bill that maintained the status quo and was loaded with special interest provisions. Fortunately, today the American people and airline safety have won out over a small group of House Republican leaders.

- With Thanksgiving – the biggest travel time of the year – just around the corner, Congress must quickly put this aviation safety agreement into law. The American people have already waited too long for better aviation security.
- Airline security needs to be treated as a question of national security, requiring an effective, federal law enforcement system. This measure meets this challenge. It will professionalize airline security, to make our skies safer, boost confidence in air travel, and help restore our economy. The American people deserve nothing less.